

## Abstract

A dominant, feminine, royal shield-maiden figure has been both emotionally important and at the core of the complex (and undefinable) notion of Danishness for close to a thousand years. The shield-maiden image has flourished over the centuries, especially in times of defeat, and has served to rally and rebuild the morale of the Danish people.

En stærk kvindelig, kongelig skjoldmø skikkelse har været emotionelt betydningsfuld i måske tusind år, siden Thyra Danebod. Hun er tæt ved kernen af den komplekse (og udefinerbare) ide om danskhed. Skjoldmø skikkelsen har især været aktiv i nationale krisetider, hvor den har fungeret som opbyggelig for det nationale selvværd.

Synopsis



# Mother Denmark

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Exploring Cultural Complexes  
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Denmark is often at the top of world rankings of happiness. In the *World Happiness Report 2013*, Denmark was once again named the world's happiest country.<sup>1</sup> Why? According to a new report, the eight most important factors to happiness are trust, feelings of safety, prosperity, freedom, work, democracy, cohesion in civil society, and a good balance between working and family life.<sup>2</sup>

Many Danes react with suspiciousness rather than pride, however, when confronted with the country's high happiness ratings: given the suicide rate and high prescription numbers for Prozac, they believe the ratings must arise from a misunderstanding of "happiness." Another reaction is an ironic attitude: Danes are just superficially satisfied with themselves; they don't expect much of themselves and don't care much about others.

Perhaps such reactions are based on a cultural complex: modesty is extremely important, whereas boastfulness, even merely calling attention to oneself, can result in raised eyebrows among one's social group. After a novel from 1933, *En flygtning krydser sit spor*, by Aksel Sandemose, this modesty complex is also called the "Jaante

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Law."<sup>33</sup> The novel depicts the provincial town Jante. All the repression and pettiness that dominates society is summarized in the Jante Law, modeled on Moses' Ten Commandments. The central commandment is "You shall not think that you are something (or more or better than us)." The frequent use of the term *Jante Law* in Denmark suggests that it is an integral part of the Danish ironic self-image. It is often cited as an expression of collective pressure that restricts the individual. On the other hand, those not as successful as they believe they deserve may also blame the Jante Law, turning it upside down.

The modesty complex may also have origins in Luke: "For whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted" (14:11). To take an anthropological approach to the Jante Law, however, would be to look to its origins in a general (historic) Nordic caution when it comes to highlighting one's own happiness or praising the happiness of others. Its roots can be traced to the ancient Nordic notion that happiness is protected through certain precautions: through modest behavior, the envy of others may be averted, along with this notion: "pride goes . . . before a fall" (Proverbs 16:18). Clearly, all this focus on modesty aims at establishing a narcissistic balance between inferiority and grandiosity. Perhaps this modesty is typical for small countries in general, although the focus of this chapter is on Denmark in particular.

### The Little Mermaid

When the statue *The Little Mermaid* was sent to Shanghai for the world exposition in 2010 (Expo 2010 Shanghai, China), many protested against the statue leaving Denmark at all as it was a national symbol like the Statue of Liberty. Others felt the sculpture was more a "symbol of our worst inferiority complex" and that "it is a mystery how this trifle of a sculpture can become a national issue."<sup>34</sup>

*The Little Mermaid* was not meant to be a national symbol at all; it was a tribute to ballerina Ellen Price (1878–1968), who danced the title role in the ballet *The Little Mermaid* in 1909. Edvard Eriksen (1876–1959) created the sculpture, which was displayed in Copenhagen harbor in 1913. The sculpture led a quiet life for many years, until 1935 when the Tourist Association discovered *The Little Mermaid* was more popular among foreigners than the National Museum. The tourists came to see the sculpture because they knew of Hans Christian Andersen's tale. The Tourist Association was surprised to realize the



Figure 1: *The Little Mermaid*, by Edvard Eriksen (Photographer: Rasmus Flindt Pedersen)

importance of Andersen for Denmark. After Danny Kaye played the role of Hans Christian Anderson in a 1952 Hollywood musical of the same name, the Mermaid's fame virtually exploded. The musical is not a biographical film of Andersen's real life: "The Moss Hart-Myles Connolly screenplay largely disregards the facts concerning



Denmark's great storyteller, opting for a fanciful blend of comedy, fantasy, romance and music."<sup>5</sup> Much of the story is told through song and ballet and includes many of Andersen's most famous tales such as *The Ugly Duckling*, *Thumbelina*, *The Emperor's New Clothes*, and *The Little Mermaid*. The phrase "Wonderful Copenhagen" comes from a song in the film.

From then on, *The Little Mermaid* became an icon of Danish tourism, branding Denmark as a fairytale country. Like a star in a reality TV show, the Mermaid became famous for being so terrific. Not all Danes could or would recognize Danish values in the tourist tale of *The Little Mermaid*. The sculpture was first vandalized in 1964, when her head was cut off to protest the national self-understanding of Denmark as a fairytale country, which the mermaid had come to represent. An artist later took responsibility for the "beheading." The statue was vandalized on other occasions in 1984 and 1998. The sculpture has also been used for political demonstrations. She has been dressed in a burka; she has been painted pink; she even had a dildo placed in her hand. The latest vandalism occurred in 2003 when she was pushed off her stone pedestal.

Do these stories somehow qualify *The Little Mermaid* to be thought of as constellating a cultural complex? If so, it would be by means of a kind of projective identification since the imagery around the sculpture comes from outside the country. Or, taking the vandalism into account, does she perhaps connect to a wider process taking place in Denmark from the sixties? I will return to that question later in this chapter.

The drama of *The Little Mermaid* statue is, in any case, only about eighty years old compared to the story of another feminine figure whose roots go back for at least a thousand years.

### Thyra Danebod

If cultures have complexes like people, we must also think of a culture as a kind of personality, where some complexes are more stable than others and not always traumatic or negative. Viewed from a certain perspective, Denmark as a nation has had an unusually stable history. The Viking king, Gorm the Old, who died in 958, is considered the first Danish king. The current ruling Danish royal family is still of his dynasty and is the only royal house in Europe that has maintained continuity for more than a thousand years. Gorm was buried in the

town Jelling in Jutland under a big rune stone, raised by his son and successor, King Harald, in memory of his parents, Gorm and Thyra. Another smaller stone beside it was, according to the inscription, raised by King Gorm himself over his wife, Queen Thyra.

Little is known of her as a historical person, but already by 1200 BCE, when Saxo Grammaticus wrote the history of the Danes, *Gesta Danorum*, she had acquired mythical traits. Saxo tells that Thyra demanded all of Denmark as her morning present at her wedding, meaning that even then (in Saxo's time) she personified Denmark. Another historian, Svend Aggesen, wrote about Thyra at the same time. Although the two stories are not identical, both historians agreed on the essential narrative—that she was beautiful and smart and that she wrought the construction of a protective wall around the kingdom's former southern border, *Danevirke*, as a defense against the German King Otto because her husband had become old and tired. (The archaeologists, however, inform us that Danevirke, in reality, was built long before Thyra's time; the earliest walls date from around 500 BCE.) Furthermore, Saxo and Aggesen agree that her courageous determination and wise leadership gave the Queen her epithet: *Danebod*, meaning "the ornament of Denmark."

Saxo's *Gesta Danorum* is composed of sixteen "books" written in learned Latin.<sup>6</sup> The first nine books deal with ancient legendary material; Saxo clearly wished to present the Danes as an ancient culture of people who were a natural and important part of the Western European culture group. The last seven books are historical and about events closer to Saxo's time. In the previous century, Denmark had been ravaged by civil war, but Saxo established a picture of his king, Valdemar 1, as the righteous victor.

Thyra, as an idealized strong royal figure, appears, I suggest, as a compensation for the loss of dominion over large areas of land, such as England, after the glorious Viking era came to an end—symbolized by the old and tired King Gorm. Thyra's image inspired courage and a common feeling of identity, at least in the circles of King Valdemar and his allies. But Thyra was alive among common people, too.<sup>7</sup> A local legend from the area around Danevirke tells about a war against the Germans in which the Danish army was about to lose. Suddenly a female rider on a white horse appeared. She grabbed the flag from the flag bearer, exclaiming "Shame on those who do not follow." As she rode on to lead the army, great courage returned to the Danes, and they



were victorious in the battle. Afterward, the woman disappeared, but they all believed it had been Thyra herself returning to save her people from destruction.

### Queen Margaret I

Another era of worldly greatness began under the Valdemar kings, culminating in the Kalmar Union in 1397, during the rule of Queen Margaret, a daughter of Valdemar IV.<sup>8</sup> This union included Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Finland, Iceland, Greenland, the Faroe Islands, and the Orkney and Shetland Islands. Without parallel, Margaret was the most powerful Danish woman during the Middle Ages.

After her death, she, too, took on mythological traits. Before the Viking ships in Roskilde Fjord were examined by archeologists, the local fishermen had "always" known that Margaret had let a ship sink there to prevent the enemies from entering Roskilde.<sup>9</sup> But as with Thyra and Danevirke, the ships were, in fact, much older. A tale from the island Læsø in the northern Kattegat tells that Queen Margaret once suffered a ship wreck there. The people of Læsø rescued her, and gratefully she granted them the privilege to own their land. In addition, she gave the women their richly silver-decorated Læsø dresses.<sup>10</sup> Læsø was not the only place where the queen was shipwrecked. In Reersø, a small peninsula on the northwest Zealand coast, she was helped by the locals who did not know who she was. In gratitude, Margaret granted the inhabitants tax exemption.<sup>11</sup>

She was also cunning. One day Queen Margaret was hard pressed by an enemy who pursued her near Schleswig. The Queen found a hiding place on a hill. She put shoes on her horses in reverse (so the tracks would seem to run backward) and rode away. This trick saved the Queen, and the hill has since carried the name The Horse Mountain.<sup>12</sup> A number of similar stories have been told about her in different locations throughout Denmark.

### The End of Worldly Power

The Kalmar Union held together until 1523 when Sweden left the union. Since that time, Denmark has been losing external power. During the seventeenth century, Denmark and Sweden went to war repeatedly, and Denmark lost her old territories—the whole southern part of present-day Sweden—Skåne, Halland, and Blekinge. Many territories in northern Germany were also lost. In addition, the great

1801

Danish fleet was destroyed in 1803 by the English because Denmark had taken sides with Napoleon. Furthermore, the Danish state went bankrupt in 1813, and Norway left the union in 1814.

These national, economic, and military disasters initiated, paradoxically, a Danish cultural Golden Age in which writers such as Grundtvig, Oehlenschläger, Ingemann, and, of course, Hans Christian Andersen conjured up the legendary past and sang its praise to Denmark. (The world famous philosopher Søren Kierkegaard lived about the same time, also in Copenhagen, but his interests were totally different.) The ancient idea of Denmark personified as a female royal figure was strongly enhanced through images, poetry, and also by the Danish language itself.

First and foremost, Denmark's relationship with Germany, its big neighbor to the south, has been subject to symbolization. All the other (in reality much bigger) losses were repressed. It is with Germany that Denmark has its only mainland border, and it is primarily the changing boundary conditions in Jutland that live in the collective memory. In particular, Denmark's humiliating defeat in 1864, when Denmark lost all Schleswig to Germany—and with it, alas, Thyra's Danevirke—was particularly hard.

Interestingly, Danevirke, until approximately 1800, was located at the southern boundary of the Danish language—the Danish *heart language*, its mother tongue—which from then on became an important component of the anima figure.

### The Princess in the Underground Palace

A fairy tale from Jutland illustrates this anima figure<sup>13</sup>: There was a king in Northern Jutland whose youngest daughter always thought of climbing trees. The king, believing he was going to die, said he would grant the wishes of his five children. Four of them just wanted to stay at home, but the youngest daughter wanted to go out into the world. So traveling to Southern Jutland, she came to a large forest with tall trees to climb. There, she built a castle. Soon a German prince came to propose to her, but she rejected him. On the way home, he met a traveler and complained of his misfortune. The traveler gave him a serpent to throw in the princess's face as he said: "Now you will be like dead until someone speaks to you in your mother's tongue." No sooner was that said than done than the princess fell to the ground, the castle sank, and a dense forest grew up around it. A long time



passed. A poor widow in Northern Jutland had a son who heard about the castle. He went off with the intention of finding the princess, and he managed to get through all the obstacles, including climbing from tree to tree. He went into the palace and found the princess. "You look pale," he said, "I wish I could save you!" But as he had talked in her mother tongue, she woke. The castle and its people were freed from the curse. Now the young couple married and went home to her father, who was so happy that he decided they should inherit the kingdom after him.

In the old days, Northern Jutland designated the peninsula of Jutland down to Kongeåen. Southern Jutland covered the area from there down to the river Eider, which is connected by Danevirke to

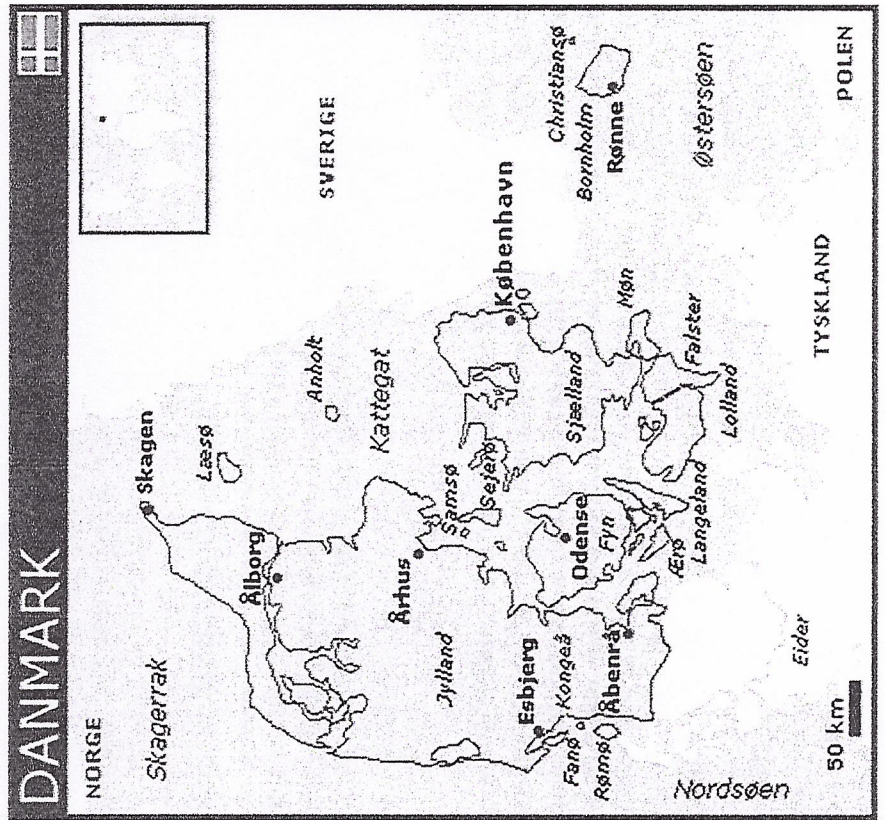


Figure 2: Map of Denmark

the east coast. Fairy tales seldom have any interest in geography or nationality, but this one, collected in the mid-nineteenth century, picks up themes that had become quite heated. Denmark's hostility toward Germany is personified in the rejected suitor who takes revenge in a way similar to the better-known thirteenth-century fairy tale *Briar Rose* by the Brothers Grimm. The princess exhibits nonconformist female behavior in her love of climbing trees and wanting to travel the world and build her own castle. Her savior, who speaks the Danish folk language and who can climb trees as easily as the princess herself, actually had to be of lowly birth in order to use Danish. He personified Denmark, too. In the early nineteenth century, Denmark really was a poor, undeveloped peasant country. Among the upper classes, the court language was French, the administration language was German, and the scholarly language was still Latin.

### The Shield-Maiden—Mother Denmark

This painting from 1851 by Elisabeth Jerichau-Baumann illustrates perfectly the shield-maiden image. The young blond woman is walking in a Danish corn field with the sea at the horizon; she carries the Danish flag over her shoulder and a Bronze Age sword in her hand and wears a heavy ancient gold ring around her neck. This could have been a portrait of the Viking Queen Thyra, a thousand years before. The painting was never accepted in the world of fine arts, but it became immensely popular, even iconic, and to this day, any Dane would immediately know what it means.

The image is called *Mother Denmark*, but this kind of motherhood is far from what Jungians associate with the mother archetype. I refer to such a figure as a representation of the *daughter archetype*.<sup>14</sup> I define the daughter archetype as a basic concept for the woman as a subject for herself, a concept for female agency that otherwise is lacking in analytical psychology. I've chosen the term to differentiate it from the mother archetype. The phenomenology of the daughter archetype is represented at all levels of psychic functioning. The images range from ego-representations to goddess-like Self representations. The notion of the daughter archetype addresses the female psyche, but it does not define the feminine as such. In masculine psychology, the daughter archetype appears as the anima.

Historical examples of this archetype go quite far back: The Sumerian Inanna was a goddess of both love and war. Originally, she



was the special goddess of the city-state Uruk. The armed Valkyries, Diser and Fylger, have been known since Scandinavian pagan times. The Norse Freya was also a love and war goddess.

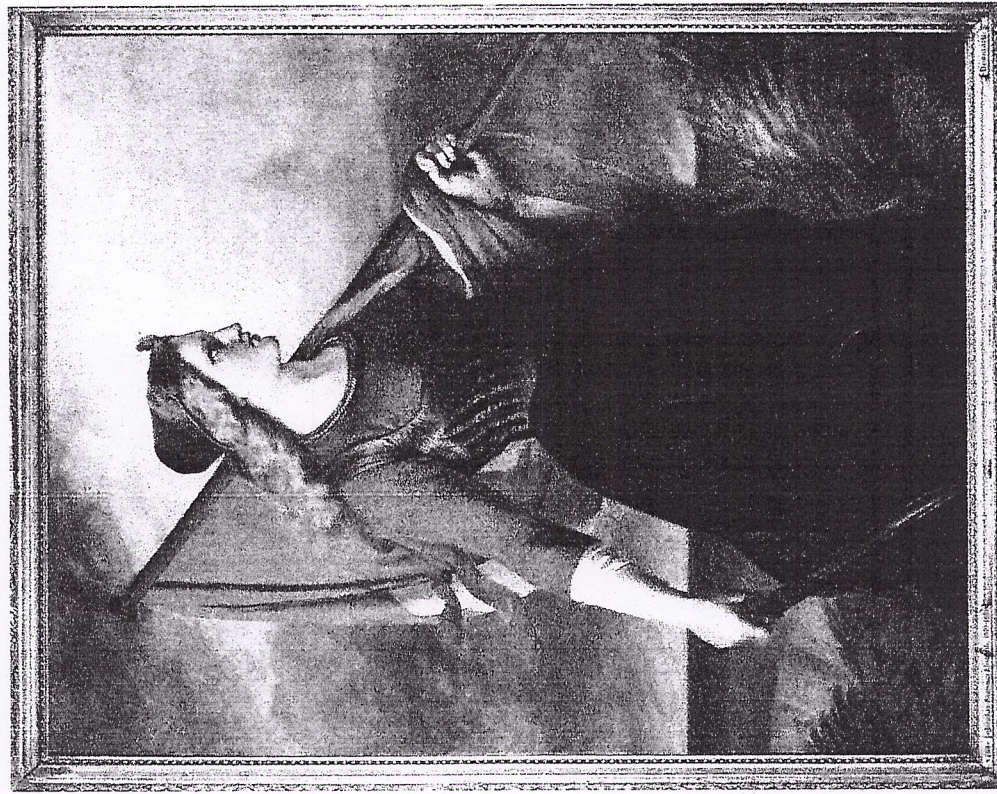


Figure 3—~~Hoyfue, 1863~~ by Elisabeth Jerichau-Baumann (1819–1881). Brandts Museum. (By permission of Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, København. Photographer: Ole Haupt.) + SMK

### The Singing

A new custom of singing together began in the mid-nineteenth century; national songs in Danish spread across the country, both as part of public education as well as in public meetings.<sup>15</sup> In my own school days in the 1950s, the whole school gathered every morning to sing from a rich repertoire of national songs. Moreover, we heard about the Nordic myths and the legendary kings of Denmark's prehistory. In this way, we realized that, although we were only a small country, we had a rich and noble common past.

Denmark was typically portrayed in such songs as a beautiful, young noble shield-maiden, who now guarded a spiritual Danevirke, as in the song "Our Mother's Tongue Is Wonderful" by Edvard Lembecke (1859):

If in the east and west we have raved and sought  
The wisdom of bygone days, the distant countries wit,  
She lures, and she draws, we follow her bid,  
Because she is so young and so lovely to behold.

Her enemies, they thought to cause her grief,  
they offered her bondage in her own castle,  
but just as they thought she was bound and chained,  
she laughed so hearty that all chains burst.

And the bards, whom she bestowed the power of words,  
they formed around her throne a strong and loyal guard.  
Every song that people knew and listened to with pleasure,  
became a ring of armor covering her breast.<sup>16</sup>

Inge Adriansen differentiates between the official symbols of the State and, what she calls, "unofficial symbols"<sup>17</sup>: "The unofficial symbols reflect the ideal of a harmonic national community, while there is barely any reference to the state and, in such manner, they present themselves as being apolitical and unchanging."<sup>18</sup> They have "prepared the ground for a largely non-aggressive internalized nationalism."<sup>19</sup> The *official symbols* are what Jung would call "signs" because their exact meaning is known and well-defined, whereas the *unofficial symbols* are "symbols" in the Jungian vocabulary.

In more psychological terms, this dominant feminine figure has been emotionally important for a majority of the population and is at the core of the complex (and undefinable) notion of *Danishness*. Other European countries have feminine personifications, too, but I believe none of those have had quite the same importance to their populations.



As mentioned earlier, the shield-maiden image flourished especially strongly in times of defeat, and so it did once again during the Second World War—occupation by Germany from 1940 to 1945. Many poets of left-wing persuasion with an international attitude, who prior to the war had despised national symbols, now wrote glowing poems about Denmark as a subjugated, maybe raped, yet deeply loved woman.

Post-war Western Europe experienced an economic boom during the 1950s and 1960s that had not ever been experienced previously. The socialist governments that dominated the period began the construction of the modern welfare state, and broad sections of the population gradually accumulated considerable material wealth. This increased prosperity made leisure, vacation, consumer goods, and entertainment essential elements in the lives of ordinary people.

#### The Great Change: Youth Rebellion and Women's Movement

Part of the late 1960s so-called youth rebellion was against what was seen as a spiritless materialism in their parents' generation. But the rebellion went much further: several groups attempted a break with traditional policy forms, social structures, and family patterns. In short, down with all the authorities—down with the old boring traditions. Participants in the youth rebellion experimented with forms of family, sexuality, religion, dress, and narcotics. Gradually the youth rebellion changed character, in the sense that more serious political organizations came to dominate it—often with declared Marxist positions. This added momentum to the effort to abolish what was seen as bourgeois norms and traditions in general.

Different groups of women also increasingly rebelled against the traditional view of women. The revolt came partly because of several phenomena that emerged during the postwar period and especially in the 1960s: women coming into the labor market, the pill, and access to abortion. The Danish feminist movement was inspired by an international development, formulating a theoretical basis for the notion that gender differences are not only biologically, but also socially and culturally determined.

I believe the political and artistic actions against *The Little Mermaid* can be seen in this light. Famous with and visited by the

capitalists from the United States, as a small, inward-looking figure, she deserved to be decapitated!

Interestingly, the same Jerichau-Baumann who painted the iconic *Mother Denmark* also did several little-known paintings of *The Mermaid*; this one from 1863 is the first. She was a personal friend of Hans Christian Andersen, and he wrote a small poem to thank her for

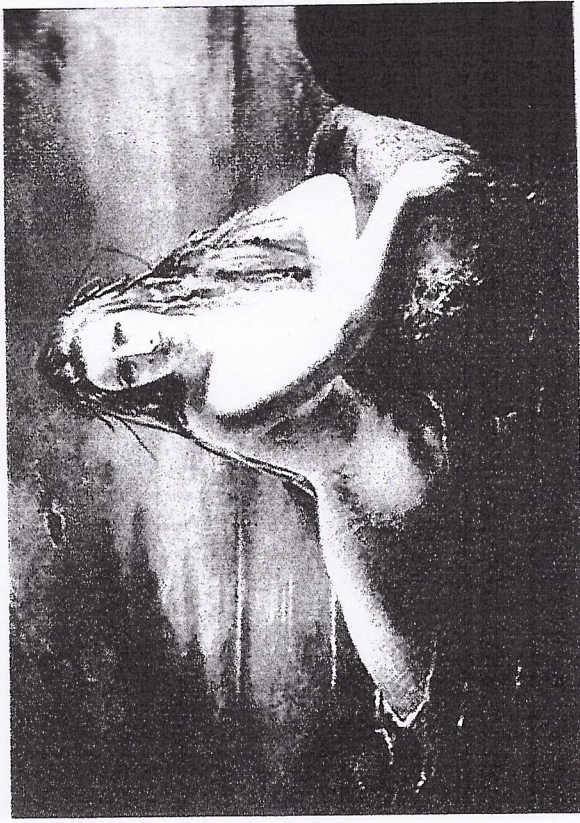


Figure 4: *The Mermaid*, 1863, by Elisabeth Jerichau-Baumann (1819–1881). Fyen Museum.

putting soul in the eyes of the mermaid.” Soul is, however, not the first thing you might notice about this pin-up mermaid!

#### Political Upheaval

When Denmark joined the European common market (now called the European Union, or EU) in 1972, it was in many ways the major postwar epoch-making event. From then on, Denmark was economically as well as politically a part of a wider Europe.

Contrary to expectations, a deterioration of the economic situation soon followed, and this had its political counterpart in the so-called landslide election in December 1973. One-third of the



members of the parliament were replaced, and the number of parties represented in parliament doubled from five to ten. Three of them were brand new parties; one of these was an ultra-liberal protest party, *Fremskridtspartiet*, with a political program that looked like a joke. Among other things, the party called for abolishing the income tax, reducing the public sector significantly, monthly elections of a greatly reduced parliament, and abolishing defense and replacing it with an answering machine saying “We surrender” in Russian. Nevertheless, the leader, Mogens Glistrup, and his party appealed broadly to Danish society. In 1973, the party stormed into the parliament after the elections as the country’s second largest party. Ten years later, Mogens Glistrup ended up in prison for tax fraud. By then his party—significantly reduced and suffering from a number of splits—had taken up another concern, unnamable by the other parties: worries about immigration.

Net migration had started to change the country’s cultural profile. Guest workers from Turkey and Yugoslavia had been in the country since the 1960s, and they stayed. The number of foreign-born grew, therefore, and ghetto-like concentrations of immigrants in the major cities began to arise.

Between 1989 and 1992, the Iron Curtain fell and the Cold War ended; the EEC became the European Union (EU) through the Treaty of Maastricht, or The Treaty on European Union (TEU), which represented a new stage in European integration because it opened the way to political integration. The treaty introduced the concept of European citizenship, reinforced the powers of the European Parliament, and launched the economic and monetary union (EMU). Opposition to the European Union—idea among the Danish population proved to be much more extensive than politicians had imagined, and in the referendum held on June 2, 1992, the Treaty of Maastricht was rejected, sending shock waves all over Europe. A number of exceptions for Denmark were negotiated, however, and another referendum passed in 1993.

### The Splitting of the Cultural Complex

What happens to a cultural complex that used to be a uniting factor in the collective consciousness when its content, over a relatively short time, seems to be devalued? Clearly, the nation had become deeply divided on several issues concerning its own identity—

relations with Europe and immigration. From the last decades of the twentieth century, any serious use of the Mother Denmark imagery has automatically stigmatized the user as a backward nationalist or even a racist person or party. This strong, negative emotional reaction was a sure sign of the activated cultural complex, only it was now polarizing the population instead of uniting it.

*Dansk Folkeparti, DF* (The Danish Folk party) was founded in 1995 by Pia Kjærsgaard. In a cartoon by Roald AIs from 2007 in the Danish newspaper *Politiken*, Pia Kjærsgaard was shown dressed in a soiled and torn Danish flag with a satirical reference to the Mother Denmark figure. Clearly, her way of thinking “Danishness” did not please the cartoonist, who himself is left-wing. The DF’s political program places a strong emphasis on national emotional values—“Danishness”—a restrictive and tight immigration policy, opposition to the development of a multiethnic and multicultural society, and strong criticism toward greater political integration in the EU.

When the DF first sent MPs to the Danish parliament, *all* the other political parties agreed to keep them from having any influence. They were simply seen as unfit to join a respectable company. But as the party steadily grew after each election and as it became the parliamentary support party to the “blue” (liberal) right-wing government from 2001 to 2011, securing its absolute majority, contempt and even hatred of the DF was expressed by the “red” (socialist) left-wing parties. After that, polls automatically count the DF votes as a part the “blue” block, which is, in a way, contradictory because most of their voters are former social democrats, belonging to the “red” left-wing block. The last election in June 2015 came out with DF as the second largest party.

### The Queen

While all these changes have been occurring for the last half century, one symbol has remained a positive, unifying force of the cultural complex, incarnated in Queen Margrethe II herself. She was born in April 1940, just a week after the Nazi invasion, and as the royal couple’s first child, she became a symbol of hope in the dark years.

Margrethe became queen in 1972 when her father died, and so she has been ruling the country though all the upheavals described previously. Formally, she appoints the prime minister and is the head of the Lutheran church, but she has no political power. Instead, she,



and her family, incarnate deep emotional and symbolic meaning. Every year at New Year's Eve, she speaks to the nation on national TV, and the nation actually watches her address and discusses it. Being above politics, she embraces the entire population. Every year at her birthday, thousands of people assemble at the royal castle, shouting for her to appear at the balcony; and when she does, they cheer and wave small flags. This symbolic quality may explain why the otherwise fanatically equalitarian Danes just wouldn't dream of changing the monarchy for a republic—and also why Queen Margrethe II not only is extremely popular, but also even frequently appears in the dreams of clients in my analytical practice, usually with positive associations relating to her independence and intellectual and creative interests, which include painting and a serious interest in archeology and history.

### Conclusion

A strong cultural complex has existed in Denmark for at least a thousand years, based on an image of a royal shield-maiden protecting the Danes. Interestingly, her imagery was about protecting not only borders, but also, especially in later times, spiritual, cultural, and emotional values as well as language (since the gradual loss of worldly power left "core" Denmark with one language only). The imagery helped Denmark come to terms with defeat, verbally expressed in the phrase, "Every man should build a Danevirke in his own breast."

Although the Danish queen still symbolizes a united Denmark, the population has become polarized since the second half of the twentieth century. Opinion leaders tend to look down on the threats to traditional values that are felt by a large part of the population. Serious use of Mother Denmark imagery now brands groups as right-wing, whereas the left-wing only uses the image for satirical purposes. But the strong emotions around the issues involved show that the cultural complex is still quite active.

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## Italy

